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literature, intended for those who do not expect to continue their work beyond their present study; (B) a class in Freshman literature, for those who are planning to take considerable work in English; (C) a class now studying American literature, all of whose members have had one year of college English literature.

The results of the test were as follows:

	Division A (120 Replies)	Division B (48 Replies)	Division C (73 Replies)
Average grade on naming one book	22 per cent	52 per cent	71 per cent
Average grade on giving the century	19	45	59
Average grade on naming the author	28	61	79

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MOTIVING ENGLISH COMPOSITION

. . . . A paradox

Which comforts while it mocks

is the fact that the trend of opinion about handling English, the most ideal subject of the curriculum, bears the earmarks of the most practical thing of the day, the vocational notion. We have two opposite elements. In one breath we are told to maintain at its greatest height or to shove a notch or two higher the idealistic standard of the classics—to emphasize the intangible values of sweetness and light and truth, which are as non-commercial as starlight; in the next we are urged to make composition of immediate, pseudo-dollar-and-cents use to youngsters right now while they are in school. Recent suggestions for the separation of the two are interesting. While it may be said on one side that very likely the oil of human idealism and water of bread-and-butter foresight mix in school as well as they do in life, it may be answered on the other side that some of us would welcome an improvement there if we could get it, and that the separation would certainly be a relief. Whether or not such relief is destined to come to patient English teachers—scapegoats as they are of the combined moral, artistic, and grammatical sins of the people—a reviving breeze of promise certainly seems to be stirring in the latter of our two opposing elements, the practical turn of composition methods. Especially in the idea of motiving composition, which contains the essence of the practical notion, are possibilities which, under present conditions, make a strong appeal to the weary red-ink-stained pedagogue.

The theory of motivating composition is as follows. Taking into consideration the surroundings of the students, business, home, and social, inside and outside of school, gather from how they react to these and from adolescent interests in general motives that will make students want to write things; then you assign composition work to fit the motives. The method has its roots in economics, psychology, and the spirit of the times. It is vocation-psychological; it is practical aim plus scientific method, used to get the *x* of interest and application. In Montessori language its object is to get young people to burst out spontaneously into correct and excellent expression.

Motiving is particularly appropriate in English for two reasons: First, it lessens the proverbial dulness of theme-writing, not yet vitalized although relieved by more wideawake textbooks and teachers. Secondly, it easily lends itself to practical uses—hardly less easily than the manual-training, cooking, and other strictly vocational departments; for students really have as much use for letters, for instance, or newspaper write-ups, as they have for footstools and eggs-in-the-nest. If this idea is once thoroughly driven home, the old “I don’t see what good it does” will be banished from students’ minds.

An interesting try-out of some of these motives was made last winter in the Lidgerwood High School. The community furnished a good background because of general interest in the schools and a prevailing wideawake attitude. The presence of spirit—personal, high-school, and town—was noticeable among the students. The first experiment tried a combination of vocational and social motives. The editor of one of the local papers offered a money prize to the high-school English class which should furnish the best school items to his paper during the nine months’ school year, and a contest was initiated between two English classes, each class writing the items in alternate weeks. The term “item” was extended to include write-ups of match games in athletics—football and basket-ball—social affairs connected with the school, talks and addresses given before the high school, while the school end of a ten-day community institute, including lectures and speeches by a number of men of prominence in the state, was reported entirely by students. At the end of the year the items were judged by three members of the faculty. The money was awarded to the winning class in public, and was afterward used to buy a picture for the English classroom, the name-plate of the picture bearing the name and year of the class presenting it. The practical value of the writing was demonstrated to everybody concerned in each issue of the paper. Notices of school events, advertising

of programs and games dovetailed especially well with live student interests. Student boosters of athletics, members of football teams, saw a new worth in composition. The social motive came in on the contest side; a good-natured rivalry between the two classes flourished alongside of a propitious *esprit de corps* within. Personal ambition was touched as well—for younger people as well as older like to see their work in print—and the increase of attention and concentration on the details of writing was surprising; however, as these articles were always unsigned, credit being given to the class only, the appeal was more especially to the spirit of teamwork and the sense of practical use.

The second experiment made more of the personal equation as a motive, combining it, however, with school and town spirit. It was proposed that all the English classes should get together material for a special school edition of the same local weekly, the editor offering to print the material and furnish cuts. The edition was to be a town and school history, and subjects relating thereto were worked out in classes and assigned to separate students, about fifty taking some part. The articles varied from two- and three-column essays to space-fillers of a line or two in verse, longer articles being furnished by Juniors and Seniors in exposition work, shorter sketches and descriptions being done by the Sophomores, while a number of Freshmen did good work on biographies of pioneer citizens and accounts of the history of separate business enterprises. The writing was carried on with increasing zest in the English department, while interest outside also helped appreciably, for it was surprising to see how many people had enough kindly interest to help the students by information, encouragement, and appreciation; interviews with old settlers turned out especially happily. The scheme furnished an effective vocational-social motive, and, as was true of the contest, resulted in a live, wideawake attitude toward composition which means much and has often seemed as far out of reach as the pot of gold at the foot of the rainbow.

The results as a whole cry aloud the praise of the method. Not only the interest aroused at the time, though it was of course grateful, was of value, but much more important was the change effected in the attitude of the students toward the subject. This good result seems likely to be fairly permanent, for students as well as instructors realize the advantage of the new order of things. Theme-writing was jolted out of its rut, and what that means can be fully appreciated only by those who have sadly traveled with it in the rut. Indeed, perhaps we can best express the beneficial result of motivating composition by saying that it

makes a salutary and permanent change in the student's viewpoint. Granting as an axiom—as Socrates, Emerson, and Elbert Hubbard would have us do—that viewpoint makes all the difference in the world, the vocational-social angle for the student would seem to be emphatically the desideratum of the English pedagogue.

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AN EXPERIMENT IN CORRECTING ENGLISH

Is it possible that the writers of the excellent and helpful articles that appear from time to time in the *English Journal* have difficulty with the everyday English of their pupils? Judging from my own experience in a city high school where there is no foreign-born element, I should conclude that any teacher in a public school must face such a problem.

Assuming that to be the case, what are we doing toward improvement? What can we do? To be sure, few teachers will let a grave grammatical error pass without comment.

"I haven't got no book," says Thomas.

"You mean you have no book," amends the teacher.

"I have no book," Thomas repeats obediently.

But how much is actually done toward erasing the brain impression that has been forming ever since Thomas was old enough to play with the big boys next door?

Feeling the ineffectiveness of such casual correction, I have been following a plan which has been so successful that I am encouraged to "pass it along."

On the first day of the term one pupil in each class is given a book in which he is to record for the succeeding week the errors made by his mates. (Ideally, of course, he should be able to do so without assistance.) At the beginning of the next week his duty is to transfer the mistakes from the book to the blackboard, while a second pupil does the recording. In this way, every member in a class of ordinary size has charge of the secretarial work some time during the term. Next, the pupils correct their errors orally, never of course being allowed to read the mistaken form. During the first weeks they are asked to explain what is incorrect. This immediately belies the remark we often hear: "I know, but I don't think." The fact is, they neither know nor think. Finally, a percentage graph of all the classes is made by a boy who is recommended by the mathematics department, and who takes pride in the neatness and accuracy of his work.